

While we could not possibly satisfy all Marylanders in every respect with a single document, we have produced in my opinion a sound constitution which will satisfy a majority of Marylanders on most points. The document was carefully conceived and required hours of patient deliberation. It is a blend of the variety of viewpoints and experiences represented at this Convention. I feel confident as I express my wholehearted approval for this Constitution, with my signature, that a vast majority of Maryland citizens this May 14 will likewise approve this document with their votes.

It is fitting that the drafting and signing of this new state charter should take place in Maryland's historic State House. Over 180 years ago the Old Senate Chamber witnessed the signing of another historic document, the Peace of Paris, which ended the Revolution and gave the thirteen colonies their independence. A few years later from this State House the Annapolis Convention issued the call to the states which led to the framing of the United States Constitution.

Maryland was a leader in the formation of the government of the United States. In keeping with this tradition of leadership, Maryland today is in the forefront of a movement to improve our state governments by rewriting the antiquated constitutions which are hampering the ability of our states to tackle effectively the problems of this century. Many states are watching us closely for encouragement in their own efforts to redraft their inadequate state charters.

Within a few hours our work here will be completed, and for my part I am persuaded that we have produced a good, sound, reasonable basic law for the people of Maryland. Ah yes, I have had some doubts about parts, as I suspect most—if not all—of you have.

But when I am assailed by these doubts, as I have been a few times, I am reminded of a moving and dramatic event that occurred in the early years of our Republic.

It was in Philadelphia in 1787, and a little band of statesmen had just completed, much as we have now, a final draft of a document—a document that later was to be hailed as one of the greatest ever forged by human being, our own federal Constitution.

At that time, on September 17, 1787, there were grave misgivings and serious

doubts among the group. And of those who entertained some doubts was one Benjamin Franklin, then 81 years of age, with a career already behind him that had not been, and still has not been, excelled in the history of our nation.

The venerable Doctor Franklin confessed that there were parts of the document he did not approve—and I think this has been quoted on the floor of our Convention by a delegate a few weeks ago, but I believe it bears repeating on this occasion, and I quote from him—

“But I am not sure,” he said, “I shall never approve them. For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information or full consideration, to change opinions, even on important subjects, which I once thought right but found to be otherwise.

“In these sentiments, Sir”—I am still quoting—“I agree to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such, because I think a general government necessary for us. I doubt, too, whether any other convention we can obtain may be able to make a better Constitution. For when you assemble a number of men, to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It therefore astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does. . . . Thus, I consent to this Constitution, Sir, because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best.

“On the whole, Sir,” he said, “I cannot help expressing a wish that every member of the Convention who may still have objections to it, would, with me on this occasion, doubt a little of his own infallibility—and to make manifest our unanimity, put his name to this instrument.”

When one's memory spans as many decades as did Doctor Franklin's—and as does mine—it is a little hard to maintain a stance of infallibility, of perfect rectitude, of certain righteousness. One at that stage has too many recollections of views once held to be unassailable which later proved to be in error, of thoughts once held sacred which proved ultimately to be unsound.